

A background image of a vibrant rainbow arching over a blue sky with white clouds. A white rectangular box with a yellow border is centered over the rainbow.

## **2022 SAMHSA SOAR JUNE E-NEWS**

### **Celebrating Pride Month**

During this Pride Month, we are celebrating our friends and neighbors in the LGBTQ+ community and encouraging SOAR providers to operationalize our values by increasing our understanding and knowledge about respectful language, the importance of asking for and sharing pronouns, and other best practices.

Our colleagues at the [Center of Excellence on LGBTQ+ Behavioral Health Equity](#) provide behavioral health practitioners with information on supporting people identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, two-spirit, and other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions.

Their website has a lot of information and learning opportunities that you can explore, but we want to highlight their self-paced online course. It includes six modules that cover information on terminology, general identity development, disparities among LGBTQ+ populations across the lifespan, and best practices for behavioral health providers.

**[Check out the Learning Modules here](#)**

### **June Highlights**



## **Welcoming New Project Assistant, Alisha Fletcher!**

We are pleased to welcome our new Project Assistant for the Housing and Income Supports Program Area at Policy Research Associates, Inc., Alisha Fletcher! Alisha will be supporting both the SAMHSA SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) Technical Assistance (TA) Center and Homeless and Housing Resource Center. Alisha spent the last year on outreach efforts for the lead agency in Tulsa, Oklahoma's Homelessness Continuum of Care. She also completed her master's degree in American studies in December! Prior to her current work, she supported electoral campaigns as a Field Organizer. The common denominator in her work is a passion for policymaking and systems change. For fun (and stress relief), Alisha loves to bake! Otherwise, she can typically be found on a kayak or trying her hand at some new creative project.



## **May SOAR Leadership Conference Recap**

The SOAR State Team Lead Leadership Conference was held on May 17-18, 2022, at the Georgian Terrace Hotel in Atlanta, Georgia. SOAR State Team Leads from across the country gathered to discuss SOAR strategies and best practices, share challenges, discuss solutions, strengthen networks, and connect with colleagues!

The entire SAMSHA SOAR TA Center staff welcomed 39 participants from 33 states for a 2-day conference, featuring the following topics and special guests:

- building successful relationships with the Social Security Administration (SSA) and Disability Determination Services (DDS), with special guests Gloria Robinson (South Carolina DDS Program Analyst) and Patti Patterson (Atlanta Regional Communications Director, SSA);
- SOAR implementation in legal settings, with Stefani Lopez-Howard and NaShandra Howard representing the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council; and
- leveraging Medicaid dollars for funding opportunities, with Wendy Tiegreen, Director of the Office of Medicaid Coordination and Health System Innovation with the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities.

The SAMSHA SOAR TA Center extends our most sincere gratitude and appreciation to all the special guests as well as the State Team Leads Sarah Murray (North Carolina), Caroline Bolas (Maryland), Georgi Fisher (Virginia), Michele Murff (South Carolina), Christy Spangler (Tennessee), Chelsey Myhre Foster (Wisconsin), Jami Hansen (Montana), Lindsay Cutler (Rhode Island), Mandy Reagan (New Hampshire), Jonathan Pendergrass (Kansas), and Candace Talty (Ohio) for their outstanding jobs in facilitating sessions and sharing lessons learned and best practices from their state SOAR initiatives!

The conference would not be complete without the privilege and honor of having a SOAR beneficiary serve as our keynote speaker to help remind us of why we do the work that we do! We hope that the energy of the room, the passion and commitment of the facilitators, and the hope shared through the courage of the keynote speaker will reignite State Team Lead commitment to keep SOARing in your communities!

## See How SOAR Works



## Tips for Completing SOAR-Assisted SSI/SSDI Applications

Once you have submitted a [complete SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI application](#) to SSA, your job is not finished—following up with SSA and DDS is key!

If your local SSA office has a SOAR contact, work with them to ensure the case is complete and moving forward, but if there is no local SOAR contact, connect with the SSA claims representative that is assigned to the case. Similarly, you will want to introduce yourself to the DDS adjudicator assigned to the case, reach out to them regularly, and ensure that they have all the information they need. If you need assistance connecting with your local SSA or DDS office you can reach out to your [SOAR State Team Lead](#) or [SAMHSA SOAR TA Center liaison](#).

## SOAR Success in Kansas

Tara Deweerdt from Crosswinds Counseling and Wellness in Emporia, Kansas, wrote in to share this incredible SOAR success story:

“Paula”\* was referred to us in June 2021. By that point, her mental health had been deteriorating for several years, leading her to leave her job, destabilizing her relationships with her husband and children, and culminating with threats of violence.



Following these threats, Paula was escorted to the emergency room by the police where she was held until she could be placed at a psychiatric hospital. After her release, Paula continued to live independently with assistance from family with daily living skills, completing paperwork, and scheduling or remembering appointments or medications.

We were able to determine that Paula was disabled according to SSA’s “Blue Book” (Disability Evaluation Under Social Security), with an onset date in mid-2019. Using the SOAR model as I assembled her application allowed me to adequately document and record all the symptoms of Paula’s mental illness in the Medical Summary Report. Following the SOAR model proved beneficial in this case as she had a significant amount of records from several different locations that were difficult to decipher. The SOAR model allowed me to combine all the necessary documents to provide them to SSA in a way that was complete and clear.

Paula was approved for SSDI benefits and received a back payment of \$32,129. Additionally, her underage daughter was also approved for Social Security benefits with a back payment of \$16,952, for a total family back-pay amount of \$49,081. Paula has now been able to access much-needed mental health services due to her approval for Social Security benefits, Medicaid, and Medicare. Having a stable income and ongoing medical care has significantly changed Paula’s life. She can now afford adequate housing and continuing mental health services, and her daughter is taken care of.

**Submit Your SOAR Success**

*\*Sharing Our Successes stories are edited for brevity and clarity. All beneficiary names have been changed to protect anonymity.*



## SOARing Over Lunch Conference Call

*June 21, 2022, 1:00 p.m. ET*

**Add SOARing Over Lunch to Your Calendar**

## In Case You Missed it

### American Indian and Alaska Native Engagement Toolkit

April 19, 2022, 2:00–3:00 p.m. ET

The SAMHSA SOAR TA Center is excited to announce the release of the [\*Toolkit for Engaging With Native Communities!\*](#) This culturally tailored toolkit was developed to guide SOAR providers in establishing, growing, and sustaining their SOAR initiatives in American Indian and Alaska Native communities. The materials in the toolkit help providers to determine which Native communities, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations are in their service areas and to offer culturally appropriate methods for contacting Native providers about getting involved with SOAR. The toolkit also features several culturally specific resources to enhance the cultural competence of SOAR providers, community organizations, and non-Native partners serving Native communities and clients. Resources in the toolkit include an overview of social and economic disparities in Native communities, federal agencies that serve Native individuals, and best practices for engagement and collaboration, as well as the issue brief [\*SOAR Enhances Income Stability in American Indian and Alaska Native Communities\*](#), various infographics, and contact information for specific Native communities by state.



## SOAR Webinar Rewinds!

**[SOAR Enhances Income Stability in AI/AN Communities](#)**

In this webinar, held on April 28, 2022, representatives from both the systems and community level shared best practices for engaging Native individuals to complete SOAR-assisted applications, and discussed strategies for gaining buy-in for SOAR from AI/AN communities in both urban and rural settings.

## **Establishing an Equitable SOAR Referral System**

In this webinar, held on May 24, 2022, presenters outlined the importance of a strong referral system, introduced the tools available on the SOARWorks website, and instructed providers on how to utilize these tools to create effective and equitable referral systems. Experts from the field also shared their experiences and lessons learned from creating and implementing successful referral systems at the CoC and agency level.

## **Federal Updates**

### **New Fact Sheet on SSI and Other Benefits [PDF]**

Last year SSA introduced the redesigned *Social Security Statement (Statement)* and several accompanying fact sheets. The new *Statement* makes it much easier for people not receiving Social Security benefits to find the information they need to plan their financial future. It's one of the most effective tools a person can use to check their earnings history and view future Social Security benefit estimates. This month, they released a new supplemental fact sheet titled *Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Other Benefits: Information for People with Limited Earnings [PDF]*. In addition to providing information about SSI and other Social Security benefits, the new fact sheet details other programs and resources for people with low income.

## **Partner Updates**

### **New Resource From the Homeless and Housing Resource Center**

The Homeless and Housing Resource Center (HHRC) released a new publication, titled *Guide to Methamphetamine Use, Treatment, and Housing Considerations for People Experiencing Homelessness*. This guide explores how service providers can better support people who use methamphetamine in the process of transitioning into and maintaining housing.

## **More From SOAR**





Do you have a job posting you would like to share with the SOAR community? Please [submit it to the SAMHSA SOAR TA Center!](#)



**State Directory**

**Library & Tools**

**Contact Us**



The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) Technical Assistance (TA) Center is sponsored by SAMHSA, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

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